

September 8, 1987

MEMORANDUM

TO: J. Lederberg, P. Doty  
FROM: J. Steinbruner  
SUBJECT: CISAC Pursuit of BW Issues

In hopes of encouraging thoughts on the subject to crystallize, let me try to summarize various conversations we have had since last October about how CISAC might usefully continue the discussions initiated on biological weapons issues.

In promoting the initial meeting we had both substantive and procedural objectives. We wanted to encourage a detailed discussion of the Sverdlovsk incident and to convey the significance that a credible explanation would have for the arms control process within the United States. We also wanted to initiate a process that would involve major Soviet biologists in a continuing discussion of the general security implications of biotechnology--a discussion that ideally would deepen over time to the point that it might offer some assurance against the undetected presence of a major biological weapons program.

The latter procedural objective has seemed to be particularly important. Since it is neither desirable nor feasible to restrict the fundamental science or the medical technology that make weapons applications technically possible, sustained dialogue with leading members of the scientific community that would have to be consulted in organizing any major military effort appears to be an important means of seeking both constructive influence and early detection of trouble. It is difficult, however, to be entirely explicit about this purpose and the dialogue certainly could not be sustained on that basis alone. There must be a viable and engaging substantive agenda, even if it is not the limit of interest.

Our substantive discussions of the Sverdlovsk incident and of possible topics for scientific cooperation produced a successful meeting in October, but these do not appear to be subjects that can be repeatedly discussed with useful effect. Hence we have been struggling to formulate an agenda that could be sustained, or at least would carry the dialogue for another round. I think it is fair to say that we have not yet had any compelling substantive ideas, but we do have reason to be encouraged by the initial procedural results. In October the Soviets brought forth new participants with relevant scientific backgrounds and briefed them on current policy and the state of negotiations to an extent that suggests a serious intention to continue the process and to deepen their involvement.

So far we have identified five topics that might be used to organize a second special meeting or an extended discussion within the context of a normal CISAC meeting:

**1) The Problem of distinguishing between offensive and defensive military programs.**

Since the Biological Weapons convention allows defensive research, the distinction assumes major practical significance. It is inherently very difficult to make even in conceptual terms and even more difficult to implement with mutual assurance.

**2) Issues associated with on-site inspection.**

With the principle of challenge inspections accepted in the chemical weapons negotiations, its extension to biological laboratories and possible production facilities seems natural. We might review the listing of facilities, as agreed upon at the review conference last September, and discuss the degree of information provided about activities at officially listed facilities, as well as the handling of concerns about unlisted facilities.

**3) Discussion of Soviet allegations that AIDS is an intended or unintended product of American BW efforts.**

Candid objective discussion of this Soviet allegation might be useful in its own right and would balance the discussion of Sverdlovsk. We would not want to grant the issue more seriousness than it deserves but it might serve to illustrate how suspicions can be generated and might be an occasion for discussing the standards that should govern the public articulation of concerns of this sort.

**4) Review of the magnitude and character of current national BW efforts.**

News accounts have given a basis for describing the U.S. program in a level of detail that we would like to have about the Soviet program.

**5) Review of Vaccine Development.**

Discussion can review technical reasons why the activity is not threatening and can assess the exchange activity that has evolved after last October's meeting.

It is my understanding that the Soviets strongly believe that a second special meeting should be in the United States. We can assume that they would use that occasion to pursue their strong interest in scientific exchanges and should be prepared for that. We also might consider the possibility of visits to Fort Detrich and Dugway that might set up a reciprocal U.S. visit to the facility at Sverdlovsk.

cc: W. Panofsky  
L. Rusten